

WHITMAN COUNTY
Department of Public Works

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MEMORANDUM

To: Art Swannack, Chair, Board of County Commissioners
Copy: Dean Kinzer, Commissioner, District 2
Michael Largent, Commissioner, District 3
Maribeth Becker, Clerk of the Board
Denis Tracy, County Prosecutor
From: Mark Storey, County Engineer
Date: July 23, 2019

RE: Property Tax Levy – Road Fund

Gentlemen:

Whitman County roads are funded through two sources, property tax and gas tax. Property tax is collected from residents of the unincorporated areas of the county. Gas tax is collected state-wide, and a portion is allocated to Whitman County for paved roads. Both sources can be used only for road maintenance, preservation, and construction. For the last 10 plus years, the revenue sources have grown by less than 1 percent per year, and costs have escalated at 3 to 5 percent per year. The Road Fund reserve balance has been dropping steadily since 2016, which means expenditures have been greater than revenues for 3 years now.

The road departments is slowly losing its buying power, and proposes a levy lid lift to be able to do a better job of maintaining the rural roads. If this proposal is unsupported by the rural residents, the quality of our rural road system will continue to decline. There is no other funding source available for rural gravel roads.

The proposal: Current Levy Rate: \$1.4525 per \$1000 of assessed value
Proposed Levy Rate: \$2.25 per \$1000 of assessed value
Single levy increase used for future assessments

Example: \$200,000 home gets \$159.50 annual increase in property tax

Annual revenue increase to the road department: \$1,424,496

The increased revenue would be used primarily to improve the condition of the rural gravel roads, which do not qualify for any other funding source. Following is a brief summary of how the road department proposes to use the new road funds:

- \$300k – annual purchase of additional gravel to be placed on rural gravel roads.
- ~~\$250k – hiring new personnel to supplement existing road maintenance staff.~~
- \$150k – annual lease or loan cost to purchase approximately 2 new graders.
- \$100k – annual cost for culvert and drainage structure replacements countywide.
- \$100k - annual increase in roadside ditch cleaning.
- \$250k – annual increase to current chipseal program, paved road patching, and improvements to the old concrete roads.
- \$250k – miscellaneous winter operations and other cost increases.

These represent our vision of the proposed increases to funding and the associated maintenance activities we propose for the rural road system. We believe that the increase in funding will significantly benefit the rural residents of the county both for everyday travel and in the support of agricultural and private business concerns countywide. The employees of the road department take pride in their maintenance of the rural roads and believe that this increase in funding will provide for a significant improvement in the condition of the rural roads that they maintain.

Thank you for your consideration,

Mark Storey, PE
County Engineer